

Sermon for Sunday, November 28, 1982 by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor
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"GOD AND HIS 'UPS'"

I Kings 19:1-18

Text: "He said, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain the prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.'"

I Kings 19:10

A couple of Sundays ago I preached a sermon on this same passage of scripture entitled Weepers Under The Broom Tree." In that sermon I talked about how Elijah ran off into the desert when he got in trouble and sat down under a little desert bush called a broom tree and began to cry in self-pity. Let me remind us how Elijah got in that predicament. When the kingdom of the Jews split north and south, a sorry sort of fellow named Ahab came to be king of the northern half of the kingdom. That portion of Solomon's mighty empire was known as Israel, and the southern portion was called Judah.

Ahab was not a good Jew, but he had a lot of political acumen. Because it was politically expedient, he married the daughter of the king of Tyre, a demure young thing named Jezebel. Jezebel was devoted to a religion called Baalism, so when she left home, she took her religion with her, including a large number of priests of Baal.

Well, you will remember how Elijah had a confrontation with the priests of Baal and put them to shame--and he also put 450 of them to death. This didn't go over real big with Jezebel and she warned Elijah that she was going to have his life! As a result, Elijah turned tail and ran, going off into the desert and ending up under a broom tree, crying in self-pity. In that sermon I preached several Sundays ago, I indicated there were several things that Elizabeth discovered out there in the desert. First, I said he discovered that there are no permanent spiritual victories. Isn't that true in your life? We fight to win some spiritual battle, only to turn around and fight it all over again. Even our surrender to Jesus is never complete for we keep discovering areas of our lives that must be surrendered to his Lordship. Well, that is certainly true in my life. I never get over having to fight the battle of greed or selfishness or self-righteousness. I never get over having to struggle to read my Bible regularly, to pray often. Isn't that your experience, too?

But the second discovery Elijah made was that while he wanted to be popular and accepted and liked by everybody, following the Lord can make you the rabbit in a hounds and rabbit chase. Well, I guess we all want to be liked. We want people to admire us and accept us, and out there under the broom tree in the desert, Elijah realized he wasn't very popular. And that really hurt. Doesn't it always hurt us, wound us, when others don't like us?

And then the third thing we said was this: Elijah had the wrong standards of success. He measured success in human terms. He thought success was to be a winner, to have all the people on his side. I like being a winner, don't you? I like it when the baseball Cardinals won

the world series. I hate it when the football team seems inept. Are you that way? We all like being winners. But human standards may not be God's standards and success in God's eyes may be far different from how we see things. After all, from a human standpoint, we wouldn't have considered the life of Jesus all that successful. Yet, the fact is, all of history revolves around him and time itself is measured by the date of his birth.

So, when I talked about Elijah several Sundays ago, those were the things we talked about and shared together. And those are important things. It is important to recognize that there are no permanent spiritual victories. It is important to remember that God doesn't call us to be popular but to be faithful. And it is important to remember that God doesn't measure success by human terms, but by divine standards. But this morning I would like to carry us one step further.

Now, imagine this situation. Here is Elijah out in the desert feeling sorry for himself. Elijah would like to quit. He has had enough. And he prays to God, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life..." After all, he has done his best, he has put all he has into being God's person, and look what has happened! Do you ever get to feeling that way? I know I do. There comes those times when I've done my best and in spite of that, nothing has worked out right or as I thought it would and I'm feeling all down, all sorry for myself.

But the first thing that God says to Elijah is this: get up! The Bible says that an angel came and there was food prepared for Elijah. The angel said to him, "Arise.." Yes, get up. God isn't going to deal with Elijah when he is flat on his back and unwilling to make any effort at all.

Have there been times in your life when you have felt like quitting? I suspect most of us have had those times when we felt utterly defeated and we wanted to quit. But the fact is, God wasn't going to do for Elijah what he could do for himself.

Do you remember what happened to the children of Israel when they were fleeing Egypt? When they came to the banks of the Red Sea they looked back to see the dust rising from the Egyptians who pursued them. Then they began to cry out to God and they said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Well, do you remember what God said to Moses? He said, "Tell the children of Israel to go forward!" (Ex. 14:15) Yes, there are times when weeping under the broom tree means we are not using what resources we have. At times like that God says to us, "get up".

I've been reading a book recently about long distance running. Apparently at a certain distance there comes a pain barrier. At that point a person is either made or broken by that pain barrier. At that point many runners begin to fold, to quit. But others push on through that pain barrier and they are the ones who become the great distance runners. Life is like that. There comes those barriers in life when we would like to quit--to give up--to cry under the broom tree. But at that moment in life God comes to us and says, "get up." I think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemany as he faces the cross with all of its suffering and pain. There in the garden he prayed so earnestly, but in

in spite of what lay before him, do you remember what he said? He said, "Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Matt. 26:46)

Now the second thing that happened is this: God tells Elijah to go to Mt. Horeb and when he arrives, this is what the Lord says, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." That is, God says to Elijah, "Look up".

Well, it is important to get up--it is important to use what resources and strength and inner power we have when life is difficult, but the fact is, so often in life we can't keep on in our own strength. Elijah was suffering from spiritual anemia. He was spiritually weak. And in his weakness God came to him in power. A lot of us this morning are trying to go it alone. A lot of us are trying to live life in our own strength and in our own power and we are not doing very well at it.

Could that be true in your life this morning? Are you trusting in yourself, leaning on your own spiritual power? I tell you, it will not work very well for any of us. And that is true not only as individuals, but for the church as well. Sometimes we act as though the future of the church or the success of the church depended on you and me. How foolish! The church belongs to Jesus. And while he expects us to get up, most of all he expects us to look up. Time and again, for example, in the book of Acts the church came under persecution. And they always looked up. The Bible says, "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31)

Whoever you are this morning I want to tell you that God wants into your heart. He wants to give you a new source of power and inner strength. Whatever your need, whatever your discouragement, whatever your heartache or burden, look up--look up!

The third thing that happened to Elijah was this: God said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholab you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. Yet I shall leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." Now, what has God said to Elijah? Well, he has said that God has people he is going to use accomplish his purposes. God has people who love him and who together will fulfill God's holy purpose. So God says to Elijah, "get up--look up" and now he says, "link up".

Oh, how we need one another! Out there under the broom tree Elijah felt he was all along. But God had other faithful men and women who loved him. Remember the story of the prodigal son? After he had spent everything and was living with the pigs, he realized how desperately he needed the love and fellowship of his family. That's when he made his decision to go home. Well, if you do not belong to a prayer group, a growth group, to a Sunday school class, a worshiping community, then you are poor indeed. I need you and you need me. If we do not feel close to God this morning it may very well be because we are not close to one another.

Do you remember the conversion of St. Paul? God sent a man named Ananias to baptize him and for Paul to receive his sight. But I suspect you don't know what the first thing is that the Bible says about Paul after that. It says, "for several days he was with the disciples at Damascus." (Acts 9: 19) Yes, he linked up.

You may face some personal problem this morning. It may be a spiritual problem, a business problem, some financial problem--whatever it is--get up, look up, link up. Your family may be in trouble this morning, your marriage strained to the breaking point, some disagreement with your children tearing you all apart--get up, look up, link up. We need to take the resources God has given us and use them. It may be counseling, it may be whatever--use what God has given us. Open our lives to the power that comes from him; fellowship with those who will be a community of loving and prayerful support. Yes, God says to you, "Get up--look up--link up."